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Work of the Proposed Central Missionary Bureau of Information

Missionary Bureau

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A number of those closely associated with the work of the recent Ecumenical Missionary Conference in New York desire to see continued in some permanent form what the Conference was in its exhibit and summation of missionary effort and in its co-operation and its reciprocal contributions.

Two propositions to this end have been discussed since the Conference: One for an International or Interconferencial Committee composed of delegates from the Conferences held more or less periodically in different countries—the one held annually in New York, every January, of the American and Canadian Societies, being perhaps the largest and best known.

The second proposition is to establish a Missionary Bureau with its national and local chapters in the great centers, to collect and publish such information as would conserve the results of all these Conferences and furnish reliable data, as to distribution of missionary force, occupation of fields, and vital statistics. It is evident that no one of these Conferences furnishes a sufficiently broad constituency to foster such a bureau and that by the very nature of their organizations they are not sufficiently free to act or to raise the necessary funds for a permanent work. Hence the Missionary Bureau of Information would be constituted separately. Its charter members would be persons who have sufficient interest and belief in its utility to start it and give it standing. These would naturally invite such other persons to join them as are able to contribute toward its expenses or to forward its objects in the districts in which they are living. Besides these more active members there are certain men which it

would be of advantage to have on its roll of Honorary Members.

The *objects* of the Bureau of Information can be briefly stated, but its utility will be most appreciated by those who have been engaged in similar work. These objects are: (1) To furnish the Church and especially its administrative Boards of Foreign Missions with accurate data as to the occupation of the entire field. (2) To collect statistics of an authoritative character which are constantly called for by those preparing sermons, addresses and literary productions of all kinds upon the general subject of missions. (3) To act as an agency for publications common to all the societies, thus reducing the cost and increasing greatly the availability of such literature, and for maps of fields. (4) To keep a Directory of Missions and Missionaries.

Such a Bureau would be an ever up-to-date Encyclopedia of Missions, and would stand in the same relation to Boards of Foreign Missions as the United Charities Organization does to local societies.

The *utility* of such a Bureau is manifest. The Missionary Magazines need a common center of information. Hitherto the collection of information has been made by individuals spasmodically and generally in the interest of some special publication. It is not generally recognized how great has been the expense of effort and of money required to make such a body of statistics reasonably comprehensive and complete. Many of the societies are not prepared to answer the most simple questions involving the statistics of their missions without writing to their missionaries on the field; and the missionaries frequently refer back again to their society headquarters because they have no system for compiling the statistics of the whole field. For years past the missionary world relied upon the statistics collected by Dean Vahl, of Copenhagen, who died two years ago. Since his decease the Rev. James S. Dennis, D.D., has taken up the work at large personal cost, sending statistical blanks to the

societies and their mission stations throughout the world, seeking in the most thorough and systematic manner to gather data for a comprehensive report of the foreign missionary operations of the Church and of their results as far as they can be tabulated.

The *work* of the Bureau naturally falls into several well defined departments, each of which involves the collation of material faithfully and continuously for a long period. Such periodical reports or publications might be issued from time to time as would contribute to the literature of missions and aid in approximating the solution of many questions. The utility of the Bureau would increase from year to year as the data it furnished grew more exact and comprehensive. The departments forming the immediate work of the Bureau would be:

Geographical.

The work of this department would require that the fullest and most recent maps be procured, and all places where foreign missionaries are resident, or

where there are stations or mission institutions, be indicated thereon by proper signs, and the maps made to show all the new places occupied, immediately upon the receipt of information. This will involve the continuous services of some competent cartographer. The method pretty generally adopted is to indicate only the stations of the society for whose exclusive use the map is prepared. This tends to a very partial view of the occupancy of a field and the relative strength of other organizations than the one in whose interest the map was made, and often to a total distortion of the map itself, whereby small towns in which the society has stations appear more important than large cities in which the society has none, while in some cases the cities are omitted altogether.

The publications of this department would be: (1) Blue-print copies for use of Boards and Missions, of maps showing all points occupied as far as known to the Bureau. These blue-prints could be furnished the Board regularly, or when specially applied for. (2) Atlas Maps with data and index—issued when ready, finally resulting in a comprehensive Missionary Atlas. (3) Large outline Maps for use in Missionary meetings. A popular interest might be given to the Geographical Department by the preparation of a large globe, say 30 feet in diameter, which would be the equivalent of a map 100 feet in length, showing the entire distribution of the Missionary force of the world. This might be prepared for a permanent exhibit or for a future Ecumenical Conference.

Statistical.

The value of statistics is not alone in the summation of results, or in many of the deductions that are made from them, pro or con, of the advance of the Kingdom of Christ in the world, but also in the more accurate view of the work gained by all who are engaged in it. In other words, the value of the statistics is as great to the worker and the Native Church as to the Church at Home. The very *process* of gathering accurate statistics in itself induces a certain study of the work essential to an analytical insight and proportioning of effort. The work of gathering these statistics requires much greater detail and persistency of effort than is generally supposed. It becomes a great burden to missionaries on the field to make up statistics to correspond with more than one form during the year. A very slight change in wording may require an entirely new set of figures, and unless the statistics of all the Missions are made out in similar form they do not go together, and the effort to summarize them is trying and unsatisfactory. It is a department which requires the supervision of an expert with practical experience in gathering statistics.

Bibliographical.

The preparation of a comprehensive Missionary Bibliography has been attempted at various times. The most extensive one of the kind was published in the "Encyclopedia of Missions," New York, 1891, prepared by Samuel Macauley Jackson, of which a

summary had appeared in the London Conference Report in 1888. To this bibliography the Rev. Dr. Dennis printed a supplement in his book, "Foreign Missions After a Century," and he also gave selected lists after the successive chapters in his book, "Christian Missions and Social Progress." A new bibliography, compiled by the Rev. Harlan P. Beach, appears in the Ecumenical Missionary Conference Report of 1900. The cost of publishing as well as the labor of compiling a bibliography which would cover the entire field and include all the appropriate literature would be very great. It is proposed to compile such a bibliography upon cards and put it at the service of the supporters of the Missionary Bureau, and to issue from time to time a bulletin in which the titles of new books or recent accessions to the catalogue would be published, with such annotations as would make the books more generally useful. The Bureau might eventually publish the entire bibliography if sufficient money could be raised for the purpose. It is confidently expected that there are enough persons able and willing to render expert help in compiling such a bibliography to carry such a work to its completion without extra cost to the Bureau.

Biographical Department.

The work of this department would be closely associated with that of bibliography. It would consist of a card index or directory of all missionaries, and those identified with the Foreign Missionary work of

the world, giving in brief their biography and literary productions. At present, it is often extremely difficult to identify persons whose biography does not appear in the Bibliography of Missions, though their names may constantly appear in connection with current events, or in missionary history. Who the living missionaries or missionary writers are and the number of men on the field would easily be learned from such a department. The advantage also of such a list to the Bureau is obvious, as a large part of its correspondence must be with these very persons, and circulars of various sorts would be sent them from time to time.

Science of Missions.

There has been a vast gain in the last ten years from the study of missions from the Ecumenical standpoint. Collecting from the whole range of missionary effort experience in each department of work or with regard to the application of certain principles will often make it unnecessary to learn over again by bitter experience what ought already to be well known to all who are engaged in missionary work. Contributions to this department would come in from individual writers in the form of monographs on special topics; much would also be gathered from the reports of Conferences held on Mission fields, not ordinarily accessible to the great body of the Church nor to the missionaries in other fields. This would naturally lead to the publication of a series of books at low cost, owing to size of edition, on such topics

as the following: (1) The Missionary Call and Service; (2) Administration of Missions; (3) Presentation of Gospel to non-Christians; (4) Educational Problems; (5) Medical Missionary Work; (6) Christian Literature in Mission Lands; (7) Comity and Division of Field; (8) Development of Native Churches and Self-Support.

Deputational.

One of the valuable outcomes of such a Bureau might be the appointment of certain persons to visit and study the work in the different fields, or to go out as specialists in the different departments of effort, both to study the work and stimulate the workers to the highest efficiency, thus effecting a general saving while developing a greater certainty and simplicity in the methods employed.

Office, Employees, Publications.

In establishing such a Bureau of Information it will be positively necessary to provide in the first instance for at least two persons, one to take the main responsibility under the Executive Committee and the other to assist. An office should be secured at an accessible place in the city, and there are certain publications which should be issued to report the progress in the collection of information and to contain the annual Statistics of Missions. This would constitute the minimum expenditure to be provided for.